

Why Content Blockers don't mean the end of Content Marketing



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There's been a lot of hand-wringing and worry about iOS 9's updated content blocking extensions. Apple's intention is to show that a web experience on Mobile – on Safari specifically – can be much faster than what consumers are seeing today. In a way, they're playing to their consumer, trying to prove that any negative browsing performance issues certainly aren't their fault. This is just another proof point that we're squarely in the Age of the Consumer, where consumers have not just wrested 'control' from brand marketers, but are actively reshaping how consumers engage and interact with brands.

These "content blocking extensions" block certain code sets from loading on websites. This isn't something that you simply "turn on" in Safari. These extensions effectively allow for the development of content blocking apps, which need to be downloaded and installed. They promise increased performance in speed, protection of user privacy, reduced data usage and by extension, increased battery life and overall, a clutter-free surfing experience. The extensions use a set of defined rules that tell the browser what should and what shouldn't be loaded. We're not simply talking about blocking ads here. These extensions provide the ability to block any JavaScript or CSS scripts that yes, could be used to serve ads, but also cookies, fly-out hamburger menus, images, resources, pop-ups and other content.

Now, as you might expect, marketers are concerned over the impact that these content blockers may have. Taken at face value, they have the potential to cause diminished user experience, lack of metrics, and interrupted eCommerce functions. Anything that requires a script to run is fair game.

On the surface, it certainly seems like there is the potential for a seismic effect on how brands use the mobile web to engage today. But, let's not get ahead of ourselves. First and foremost, the technology to date has been solely focused on blocking ads, not content. Secondly, it requires that the consumer take a specific set of actions – go to the App Store, identify the right app, download, configure it and then specifically "blacklist" your site. Much like the predictions of the end of days, the Y2K crisis, Dewey defeating Truman and Mark Twain's demise, I think the rumors of the death of modern content marketing are greatly exaggerated.

This type of "threat" isn't anything new to digital marketers. Digital marketing has been in a constant state of flux and adaptation for the last 20+ years. Spam filters and the CAN-SPAM act, bursting market bubbles, desktop ad-blockers, malware blockers, Facebook's ever-evolving algorithm, and ultimately, the shift from push to pull marketing in the Age of the Consumer are all examples of advancements and hurdles that we as marketers have had to adapt and overcome, and in almost all of those cases, it makes digital marketing better for BOTH sides of the equation. Today, content provides those reasons for consumers to engage, to connect or to take action. These experiences and moments are designed to convert reactions into interactions, while enabling the brand to hold up their end of the value exchange that's inherently at the heart of every relationship. And if blocked, puts that relationship with the consumer at risk.

The larger takeaway here, however, is that there really is no such thing as permanence in the state of digital marketing. The brands and marketers that are successful year over year, are the ones that recognize that change is truly the only constant . . . and embrace it.

So, with that in mind, here are the 5 things that content marketers can do to ensure stave off the content blocking apocalypse:

1. IF YOU'RE TRYING TO BE SNEAKY OR DISHONEST, STOP

I really wish that I didn't have to write this one. But these conversations only come up because some marketers try and take advantage of the system and push the boundaries to the point where the consumer stands up and says "no more!" We can ensure that these few bad apples don't have to spoil it for the rest of us by continuing to act ethically, being transparent and keeping the value exchange with the consumer firmly at the forefront of what we do.

2. CREATE COMPELLING CONTENT AND EXPERIENCES

Compelling content by its very nature, eliminates the desire to block it. It makes every "Content Marketing 101" list, but what makes content "compelling"? MXM's Big Content approach defines just what means to create compelling, high-performing content. The four characteristics of Big Content are:

- **Relevancy** - Content that fits into the consumer's personal requirements, taking into account their needs, context and preferences through personalization

- **Discoverability** - Requires an effective SEO and amplification strategy across paid, earned and owned channels, consistently optimized for sustainment
- **Elasticity** - Describes content's ability to "stretch" across multiple channels and devices, while still maintaining relevance and engagement
- **Efficiency** - A robust content measurement, tagging and optimization process is a must to deliver ongoing content efficiency

3. LOOK AT THE ECOSYSTEM THROUGH THE LENS OF THE CONSUMER JOURNEY

The Consumer Journey identifies the stages for your brand's particular purchase decision process, as well as the rational and emotional needs of the audience at each stage. This is a foundation that sets the stage for marketers to identify pain points to alleviate along the way, and what content types and themes should be used to help engage and drive consumers from one stage to the next, ensuring that you are using your entire ecosystem to engage and prove the value of your content. When content is blocked, there is greater potential for the journey to be interrupted or derailed. Providing experience and content parity across multiple channels, screens and devices within the ecosystem ensures alternative paths for the consumer as they move through their journey.

4. UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT OF BLOCKERS ON YOUR CONTENT

We've already started to see the market react in response to the rise of ad and content blockers. Most of these solutions, whether they are productized or provide a tutorial to home-grow your own, allow you to track content served vs. actual views. While there is no current solution that offers a comprehensive way to measure the impact of blockers, it will give you a strong indicator in terms of which content or scripts are being blocked. Of course, these solutions are problematic if the content blocker is also blocking Google tags or other extensions. If you're still concerned about the impact of content blockers on your site or app, add a few of the more popular blockers into your QA and publishing process to see how your latest content updates will be viewed and begin to develop methods to overcome those barriers.

5. WHEN IN DOUBT, HIRE IT OUT

Last but certainly not least, if you don't have a content strategy, or don't even know where to begin, there are plenty of resources at your fingertips. From associations like the Content Marketing Institute or recognized leaders in the field like MXM, we can help lead you to content marketing excellence, while defending against new and evolving challenges to engaging today's hyper-connected consumers. latest content updates will be viewed and begin to develop methods to overcome those barriers.

In the end, as with everything else in the Age of the Consumer, the future of content blocking and content marketing will be determined by the consumers themselves. Their decisions will hinge on balancing their desire for personalized, unique experiences and diverse content against their wish to improve performance, privacy and unclutter their browsing and consumption habits. Follow the steps above and there's no need for consumers to ever have to make that choice of one over the other.

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